

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 805

SP 036 483

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TITLE Play Is What We Desire in Physical Education. A Phenomenological Analysis.
PUB DATE Oct 96
NOTE 25p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Athletics; *Child Behavior; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Health Promotion; Physical Activities; Physical Development; *Physical Education Teachers; *Physical Fitness; *Play; Recreational Activities; *Sport Psychology

ABSTRACT

A comparison and contrast is made between different notions and occurrences of play in daily life to highlight the sense of the importance of play in a physical education lesson. The meaning and definition of play are detailed, and its impact in and as part of actual learning is discussed. Two stories of real-life situations are described in which children are "coaxed" into play as a cover for a physical education exercise. These two examples suggest that the actions of the teachers, as privileged spectators and conductors of play, have enabled every child to realize (in a physically dominated way) the social reliance, to and fro relationship, serious focus, and double meaning of play in a physical education lesson. It is hoped that the report will help teachers to reinterpret what play means and to re-value the role of play in physical education. Serious play can create situations of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social danger; it is up to the teacher's reflexive attention to the lesson to skillfully channel this danger into opportunity. (Contains 14 references.) (NAV)

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**PLAY IS WHAT WE DESIRE IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION:
A phenomenological analysis**

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PLAY IS WHAT WE DESIRE IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION:

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Abstract

This paper relies on a human science approach based on a phenomenological orientation to the lifeworld of physical education. As Smith (1992) referring to Husserl points out, this approach is focused in the sense of 'the world that is experienced in the natural...taken for granted, pre-given and already there' (p. 61). In this paper a comparison and contrast are made between different notions and occurrences of play in our lives in an attempt to give the reader the sense of the importance of play in a physical education lesson. The paper seeks to descriptively equip the reader to re-interpret what play means, to re-value the role of play in physical education. The paper finishes with two anecdotes from physical education lessons where it is proposed that the actions of the teachers as privileged spectators and conductors of play have enabled every child to realize, in a physically dominated way, the social reliance, to and fro relationship, serious focus and double meaning of play in a physical education lesson.

Play as a phenomena

What is the role of play in physical education? Maybe your recollection physical education is more akin to repetition of physical skills in drills, or even doing exercise as a punishment for lack of effort. You know, when the teacher says, "Run around the gym, any walking and you do another lap." This later perspective cannot be mistaken for play, but may have resulted from a lack of desire by the participants to be physically involved. Back to the title. Read it again and ask yourself what the word play means.

The phenomenon of play has held both a trivial and an exalted place in our culture. For example, "Oh, he is only playing," is a statement that an adult may use to explain the activity of a young child; the "only" implying the low importance given by the observer to the child's task. Of course Piaget would not have used this statement. On the other hand, Gadamer (1989) has examined the play mode of being as "the clue to ontological explanation" (p. 101). Furthermore, Huizinga (1949) claims that play is a fundamental creating aspect of cultures or even human existence when he quotes Plato as saying; "man is the play thing of the gods" (p. 19). Does this perspective trivialize human existence? Are we just beings who play or who are played with? Or does the term "play" in Plato's use hold a deeper meaning, one that associates existence as made meaningful by the play in living?

A consideration of the linguistic uses of play may help us understand play more comprehensively. Play is something we choose to do and at the same time is done to us. Gadamer (1989) indicates this when he says,

In order to express the kind of activity, the idea contained in the noun [play] must be repeated in the verb. That means that the action is of such a particular and independent kind that it is different from the usual kinds of activity. Playing is not an activity in the usual sense. (p. 104)

In English, when we say play, we do not understand it as something somebody does. A person does not suddenly become aware that he or she has learned to play as with some skill he or she have learned, i.e., "I can do a handstand" or "I can dance to a tune," compared to "I can play....," but rather the person and what or how he or she is are involved, naturally becomes play. In Gadamer's words, "As far as language is concerned, the actual subject of play is obviously not the subjectivity of the individual who, among other activities, also plays but is instead the play itself" (p. 104). A person who is playing can be recognized as engaging in play, and by playing becomes play. Play is a phenomenon that can happen at anytime, anywhere. It is so natural that it describes itself. When I say, "I have played" a listener senses what I have done. What is it the listener senses?

What is a phenomenological orientation to play in physical education?

A phenomenological orientation to play in physical education is an attempt to outline the features of a lifeworld sense of physical education through the phenomena play. As Smith (1992, p. 62) explains, these features ask us not to look only at the student in physical education, but also at how the student is placed in experiencing the lifeworld of physical education. Alfred Schutz (Cox, 1978; Schutz, 1973), a phenomenologist who sought to define and describe the structures of the lifeworld, pointed out that in human science research we try to understand the common sense world, the arena of social action within which people come into relationship with each other, and try to come to terms with each other as well as with themselves (Schutz, 1973, p. 27). All of this is typically taken for granted, not appreciated by common sense. In a phenomenological writing we are trying to foreground our understanding of a phenomena based on social interaction that allows us to see how it differs according to place, time and other phenomena. The purpose of this paper is to reveal, through a phenomenological form of writing, how play is the arena from which physical education is valued for teacher and student alike.

Metaphorical Sense of Play: Qualities of play

Play has a variety of metaphorical uses in our culture. Some of these uses tend to trivialize, or rather take for granted, the existence of play. "Playing around" can refer to not being sensible, lacking a reason or purpose, except maybe to annoy the teacher or parent if the teacher or parent does not want to play. Of course, the "play" in this phrase can be a form of fun or jest that is like two lovers or close friends seeking a relational quality with the other.

Unpredictability

We can play with others in games of chance. The idea in games of chance is to win the prize, but the real excitement is in the play process to possibly get the prize. If we win too easily our prize may lack value. Are winners of big lotteries happier with their lives after they win a fortune? If they seek more pleasures with their new found wealth, does this satisfy their needs to create meaning or purpose? These are questions that I cannot answer, but I wonder if playing for the prize is the reason people gamble, play for chance, for the possibility not the certainty of winning. The process in playing may be more significant to the person than the outcome of the play.

In gambling games we have a process orientation to play that excites us, but how does that relate to other games? With any game like marbles, tennis or hockey, we choose to engage in some recognized process. As Weinsheimer (1993) concurs in relation to games,

each has a specific spirit and a field of play that is set aside and closed off from exit and intrusion. When we assume this spirit and take the field of play--that is, when we play something, we take on a task that transforms our aims into the ends of the game. Our aim may be scoring points or even winning, but these too serve the game. (p. 105)

Uncertainty

When we play a game we want to win, but we really want the uncertainty that allows players to play. "One must want to win precisely for the ends of the game--that is, in order to play the game well" (p. 105). Does this "wanting to win" ensure that players really play? Wanting to win is not enough. For example, a tennis player of club standard may want to beat the Wimbledon tennis champion. If the two players were to play a game of tennis, barring injury the result would be determined by the Wimbledon champion. The game would not be real in the sense of playing, it would lack unpredictability, and would be unequal. The better player rarely chooses to play for the sake of playing a game they will surely win. He may choose to play for financial gain, but then the process orientation to playing is missing. However, if the game is made close, the result uncertain, there is an inherent challenge in the game and play can be realized. For example, if in a game of tennis the less able player's court is half the size of the better player's court the two players can engage in a game that creates a process of playing where the result is uncertain. In this game the process of playing is challenging due to its unpredictability, the outcome of the game is of interest to both players. Only by playing can the players find out what will happen. Is it this uncertainty that allows players to play?

A "to and fro" relationship.

Play can refer to the changing movement or action of objects, like the play of water in a fountain as it catches the light, or the play of flames in a fireplace as they engulf dried wood. Play can refer to the freedom of movement within a space like the relationship of cogs in an engine, i.e., the play of the gears. We can play an instrument to give forth sound, but we cannot just blow or manipulate the instrument in any way. To play it we must rhythmically produce the notes that create music. A music centre is played by pressing a button and the machine mechanically plays the music. A kitten can play at chasing a shoe lace, pouncing and watching as the cord swings from a height. A smile can play on Mona Lisa's face. Do all these instances of play have something in common? Do they have a shared focus that informs us to the meaning of play in our title? Can we say from these ideas of play that there is a movement quality, a "to and fro" action that is unpredictable, but yet purposeful within a controlling field or space. Is this also the characteristic of play in games?

Illusion of Play

The title to this paper is not indicating that we just get pupils to engage in an activity and call it play, rather the pupils will become in some way "play". Becoming play sounds a bit worrying, almost unnatural. After all, being something we are not can be construed as being deceitful. But, a 4 year old child plays at becoming someone or something. He or she creates the illusion of being a monster, a cowboy, a princess or a nurse. Children pretend, they become through play. The illusion is real to the player but also the player is aware that it is not real. Illusion comes from the Latin *il* [in] and *ludere* [play], implying "in play" (Sykes, 1985, p. 497). In a sense playing is creating an illusion. It is in this sense that a play can refer to performances given on a stage. A play pretends to represent some form of life through the relationship qualities we recognize such as love, betrayal, hatred and lust. The illusion in the play tries to include the audience so that it knows in what way the play is an illusion but not reality. The audience who knows the secret of this illusion is able to take part in the play. What is interesting about this relationship is that the members of the audiences become the players as spectators. As Gadamer (1989) states,

A complete change takes place when a play becomes a play. It puts the spectator in the place of the player...the person for whom the play is played. Of course this does not mean that the player is not able to experience the significance of the whole in which he plays his representing role....It [play] becomes apparent that the play bears within itself a meaning to be understood and that can therefore be detached from the behaviour of the player. (p. 110)

The player in a play has a defined role, a part to play, which along with his or her fellow performers is one task among many tasks that contribute to the meaning of the play. This role definition and task focus create order in all types of play. Without order games could not be played. Players would exist on the field of play, but would have no common aim that binds them together, that creates an alliance of one person to another. In the same way an actor relies on another actor to deliver his or her lines at the right time, to find his or her mark at the right time. Similarly young children can happily relate to the objects and/or subjects in their play world, as long as they conform to the rules or rather condition of their play world. It is interesting to watch as young children play together. They seem to need little spoken communication to establish complex conditions that control their behavior. For example, a large rubber tire becomes a boat lost at sea. The grass becomes shark infested water. If one child should fall in the water his peers will yell at him to quickly return to the safety of the boat. If the child's return is not deemed to be quick enough then the shark will get him. As long as the player respects the conditions, fights the shark and

just makes it to safety in time, the player rarely dies. If the child does "play die," a spectacle in itself, he will come back to life usually with the encouragement from his peer. After all, if he is dead then he cannot play. The roles and tasks of playing are socially negotiated and are deemed acceptable and realistic by those invited to play.

The illusion only exists for those not playing. To non-players the actions and seriousness of those playing a sport, engaging in fantasy play or acting a part in a play, is an illusion. The players however know that their actions make sense by creating a play world, but at the same time they are aware of the world of seriousness and intent that surrounds them, that is their real life. In this sense action as a result of playing has a double meaning from our functional reality. For example, a golf player can be heard talking to her golf ball. She knows that the innate object has no life, but when she plays the game she can be heard calling for the ball to fade majestically onto the green, or cursing the ball for betraying her as it speeds off at right angles into a nearby lake. If the golfer spoke to all innate objects her sanity could be brought into question, especially if she declined to laugh at her playful characterization of objects in her world. In the same way a young child can pretend a banana is a telephone receiver and can pretend to have a conversation with a friend, but when a parent plays along with the illusion the child may claim that the parent is being silly, the pretend receiver is really a banana. Double meaning is at the heart of playing. A play on words in jokes amuses us because of the alternative meanings that can indicate unusual possibilities contained in everyday life. The meanings of actions in playing games are not as a result of the necessities of life. Rather they are made meaningful by the rules and actions of players within the game. However, viewed from outside of the play-world the actions of players can often be amusing, almost comic.

When a child plays a game the child's reality is controlled by the game. The child's role becomes a part of the reality the game creates. Similarly, adults play the sports that are culturally accepted games in our society. By playing a game we also represent it. As Weinsheimer, (1993) explains

this means that the game presents itself, plays itself; but it also means that we present ourselves in it. When we play something, the game assigns us a task and a role to play in performing it. In tag, someone must be 'it'; in football, someone must play quarterback, someone offense, and someone defense. Whenever we play something there is already self-representation as this or that; and when children dress up to play house, such role playing merely makes evident the self-representation-as that is involved in all games¹. (p. 105)

¹ Weinsheimer's own emphasis.

In this explanation there is the self-representation of illusion, held together by those subjects and objects involved as long as they behave due to their assigned task and roles. The reality of the game is an illusion, as the fantasy for the young child is an illusion, as the meaning in a play is an illusion. Without play these roles and tasks would have no meaning, these roles and tasks would never have existed. And, in this way Huizinga (1949) says, "play is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life, it is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition of its own" (p. 8). This disposition of play creates the two-fold meaning of actions when viewed with the world of purpose, with non-play activities. From this world the actions are seen as tasks, recognized behaviour. The quarterback may throw the ball, but as he does that his offense run plays, the defense counter-act, the umpire supervises, the crowd goes wild, in one time and space the actions of many create the play of the game which gives meaning to each task beyond the recognized behaviour, the outcome is unpredictable.

Unfortunately, this double meaning can have negative consequences. For example, in a game of soccer a tackling player may compete for the ball too aggressively, breaking an opponent's ankle. The player's intent was to win the ball not to inflict bodily harm on the opponent, but the consequences of his legitimate actions within the game are that the opponent cannot play, cannot walk, is unable to function normally in his everyday life. If a person was attacked in the same way in the street he would have the assailant arrested for assault and battery. Such violent actions, in normal life, are condoned because they have the meaning of being wrong. In games, violent actions are often accepted as an unfortunate possibility of playing a game.

Where the task of the game is representation itself, it is possible for someone who is not playing to see the representation, to recognize the illusion. When children play house a father can peek at their playing, but he "must absent himself, for his presence would break the spell of the game or turn it into a show" (Weinsheimer, 1993, p. 105). The child's play world is closed to the outsider unless the outsider is invited to become a part of the playing. The professional sport game maintains this sense of closure despite spectators who may come for a show; the struggle for concentration by players can relate to this loss of a sense of closure. The player who performs to the crowd and not to the players in the game is known as a show-off. He discredits the game because the spectators are no longer attuned to the play but to the performance of a task like a performance of spectacular feat in a circus. It is interesting to note that a performance for a crowd is a display of ability, and the word display contains [dis] which in Latin means "anti", as in opposite or not. So [dis]play has a root meaning of anti or not play. When we display ability, to show what we can do, we are no longer playing, we are not at play.

If the task of the game is not representation, where the game is made up, it may appear as an illusion, may create a false belief as to its nature to an outsider (one who is not playing), and may seem unimportant. But for those playing there is no illusion. What they are doing is very real and is significant to them. For a person who for reasons of necessity (i.e., time to end the lesson, time to go home) stops an other's play, does that person appreciate what he or she is stopping? A mother once remarked about how her 5 year old daughter reacted on one occasion to being stopped in her play.

My daughter Joan did not want to go to the day-care even though she had been going for several months, she wanted to stay with me. I had to almost force her into the classroom. When I came back in the afternoon I thought she would be dying to leave. But, she was playing with small coloured bricks, building them up into some sort of tower. I shouted to her to come. Joan wanted me to see what she was doing. I patiently watched. Eventually, after repeatedly asking her to come I had to take the bricks away from her. We had to pick up dad. The expression on her face was so hurt. Her lower lip bubbled, and she gave me such a dirty look. I really felt I had no right to take the bricks, but we had to go, dad was waiting.

Initially in this anecdote Joan felt it was very important to be with her mother, and she seemed to want the security of her mother's presence. But when Joan got engrossed in playing, the play became the most important thing for the particular time. The mother later remarked that though she could remember the incident clearly, Joan seemed to forget the event as soon as they got into the car. In the car leaving the day care "Joan started to make faces on the window using the fog made by her own breath." For a young child most experiences can be play. Is Joan's playing with bricks the sense of play in the title, at least for a 5 year old child? What was Joan learning when she built her tower with bricks? Perhaps she was developing a complex understanding of the relationship between gravity, base of support and balance; or learning how square objects can relate to each other, or how bricks can be manipulated to create a tall thing. The possibilities are endless. If learning implies a change in understanding, often reflected in a change in behaviour, would Joan's behaviour towards building bricks change after playing with them? Does playing imply learning?

Learning through play

I still find playing tennis challenging even though I have been playing the game most of my life. I cannot say that I have learned all there is to know about how to play the game of tennis. I have learned to play every shot, but when I play an opponent I re-learn every skill and when the wind blows I learn how to apply the skills again. Each game creates a

challenge that I have to learn how to play. Learning to play tennis is unpredictable, success is not guaranteed, so I test my skills at playing tennis.

An advertisement on television describing a private kindergarten service reported with importance that children will "learn through play". This goal seems to indicate that physical education for kindergarten children could well be learning through play. Is learning through play the reason play is important for young children? A mountain of early childhood literature argues that play is important for the young child because play enables the child to learn about his world. But when does the value of play lose its importance for the child? At what age may we trivialize play? When might we discourage play? When should I stop building houses of cards?

When somebody is playful, does he or she want to learn through playing? What does it mean to be playful? Does it virtually mean that a player is full of play? A colleague of mine was trying to teach a class of seven year old children how to play volleyball. The children were definitely full of play. In fact, the children were so full of play they were practically bouncing off the walls. Whenever the teacher asked them to explore how to hit the foam ball with their hands without losing control, the children whacked the ball across the gym and screaming aloud, chased after it. In a sense the children were full of energy. This is how Herbert Spencer (1895) saw play as representing the overflow of superfluous energy. That play has cathartic qualities. What would have happened if the children had not expended energy? Is this a purpose of play? Is physical education a place to release energy and stress built up from academic work? Why does academic work make us tense? One thing that can be said is that the children wanted to play, not in a teacher oriented learning sense, but in a playful sense.

On another occasion I have seen the same teacher with the same class trying to teach the children how to catch and toss a ball with a scoop against a wall. The teacher showed the children how to get beneath the ball to catch it successfully, how to swing with the thumb leading to throw the ball from the scoop. The children played with these ideas trying to see how many times they could throw and catch the ball. They were not immediately successful. Some balls rebounded off the walls and flew across the room, and some balls hit children in the head, but with repeated attempts and encouragement from the teacher rallies of four, five, and even ten shots were achieved. In this activity the children were learning how to control an object with an implement, the basis for many games we play in society. The children announced their rally totals to the teacher with pride and did not seem to mind that others did better or worse than them. The teacher was impressed with each child's attempts. Were these children learning to control a ball using an

implement by playing with the ball and implement? Would the children learn the same things if they were not playing?

Teachers want the children to learn through play. Is that the purpose of play in school? What happened to the release of tension through play? Children like playing, but they must want to play. To play we must voluntarily choose to play in a certain way. In physical education children can play to expand energy, or they can play to learn, but each individual chooses. What happens in physical education when some children want to play to learn and some want to play to lose energy? Physical educators endeavour to get learning, often by controlling those who want to play for the sake of playing, but are they right to do so? Do all children want to play in the same way? Do all children want to play? These are questions that face physical educators daily.

Play from a player point of view

Alas, young children cannot verbalize what play means to them. They tell me it is fun. Is fun an essential feature of play? Can play exist and not be fun?

Referring to Webster's dictionary (Coestello, 1991), fun as an adjective, "a fun thing to do" (p. 539), means an activity that provides entertainment, amusement, or enjoyment. As a verb, "to fun somebody" (p. 539), is to indulge in banter or play: to joke with somebody. As a noun, "she is full of fun" (p. 539) is to imply that you engage in playful often boisterous action or speech, gaiety or laughter. Having fun implies a lack or seriousness, as jest or teasing implies a lack of earnestness in what is said or done. With this form of fun a sense of mischievousness in a playful way can exist as referred to earlier when there is an accepted relational quality between those having fun. However, this fun can become malicious when one party does not want to be teased or rather taunted and the other party persists. In this way the teaser can say, "I was only having a bit of fun, don't take it seriously." However, if the teaser says "I was only playing with you, don't take it seriously," they have a sense of play that lacks an understanding of the other, the "to-and-fro" relational quality was not realized. The teased was not in the mood or the teaser was inappropriate in his approach. In the same way a one-sided game can be fun for the winners but not for the losers, especially if the game lacked times of play where the losing side was able or willing to compete on level terms with their fortuitous opponents. Does this mean that teachers and children must be able and want to play in the same way for play to happen in a physical education lesson?

Fun seems to represent the product feelings of a person who has been engaged in an enjoyable activity. We evaluate fun with our reflective experience. I can sense when I have felt the emotional exhilaration associated with having fun. But does fun imply play?

Play demands that the player centres himself or herself on the activity as Weinsheimer (1993) believes, "The player in truth is being played." (p. 100). And as Gadamer (1989) comments, "play draws him [or her] into its dominion and fills him [or her] with its spirit. The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him [or her]." (p. 109). As stated earlier the player in reality becomes play. This allows some understanding of why a child who has seemingly played does not always say it was fun. For example I remember once asking a group of grade seven students if they had enjoyed the football round robin tournament we had just completed.

"So, was that fun then?"

The pupil's faces were all red hot, and they were breathing heavily from their exertion.

Most pupils nodded approval to my question, but one lad, John, frowned saying,

"Not really."

"Why is that John?"

"Well...we lost." He replied, almost accusing.

"Did you not win one game?" I inquired remembering each team had played three times.

John thought for a moment, "No...we drew one and lost two."

I had tried to make the teams close, and all the scores had been close, but the results were not shared evenly.

"Did you not enjoy the games?" I inquired.

"Yes." John replied, "But I wanted to win a game."

John's subjective judgement of the play process was hidden to the initial inquiry. Play was so natural that it was what happened, but for it to be interpreted as fun needed the winning outcome. Should the play process for John be devalued because fun was not the judged outcome? Surely fun had existed when John played to win. Is there always a sense of fun in playing? Would fun have been present if the result had not mattered? However, as Weinsheimer (1993) indicated earlier "one must want to win...in order to play the game well."² Without the want to win the reason for playing the game is lost, playing well to win makes sense.

We can also play to improve our chances of playing to win a game at a later date. Is not practicing for a game, for example drilling a tennis ball by repeatedly hitting a backhand stroke to perfect the stroke, also play? When we play in this way our goal is to improve a stroke, to play with that stroke better in a game, but we also play with the ball, the racquet, a training partner and the court environment. We repeat a skill until we have had enough.

² See page 3 of this paper.

Have you ever noticed how a young child plays with a new word he has just learnt. Is this not the same as the sports player practicing to refine a physical skill?

I remember a colleague telling me how the word "pompous" had really caught on in a creative dance lesson with a class of 5 year old children. The word was spontaneously repeated and repeated by the children in different tones, different speeds, and in tuneful ways. At times the children even played with the attitude of being pompous. The word appeared in conversation with no real meaning except that it amused the children. For a time the word "pompous" was a focus of play and laughter. It was as a new toy we play with until we are familiar with it, know it, when it does not surprise us any more. Once the word lost its strangeness and became familiar the children ceased to play with it. In the same way a tennis player may practice a skill until it becomes familiar to him, until he is able to repeat it on request. However, when he tries to use it in game the unpredictability of the game often reveals the frailty of the stroke so he tries to practice the stroke again, or modify its use so that he can at least get the ball in the court. It would be fair to say that when we practice we do not always play. It is possible to play initially but when the activity is predictable and no longer strange, when the novelty has worn off, then an activity becomes more task or work oriented. A work orientation focuses on the completion of a task; the worker wants to get to a recognizable end. A play orientation focuses on the process of achieving the task, the player wants to be a part of the process that aims at a recognizable end.

Do people who climb mountains, canoe rivers, fish or hike, play with the environment they perceive and interact with? These people tell me that they do it to get away from the world of duty, responsibility, and serious purpose. They want to live in another world of seriousness, one that lets them relate in a different sense physically, mentally and emotionally to the world. Is this a relational quality like the relationship a player has in the play world in games and in fantasy play? After all, why climb a mountain? Why hike when you can drive? Why spend more money fishing than it costs to buy fish? The reason for doing these activities lies in the process of doing, for an aim or a destination, but the attraction is the doing, the playing for the experience that is unique, even though it may be a repetition of an activity done before. The process to get to the outcome is sought because it is an experience that is always different for the player who has changed since his or her last experience of the activity.

When does a player play in games?

Like the play of cogs in a gear box, essential to play is the freedom of movement within a defined space. Even though cogs in a gear box have precisely defined roles and

correct positioning, the movement of cogs in a gear change allows play. Somehow, the racing driver is not a racing driver unless he changes gear and we cannot play at being a racing driver unless we change gear. Why is that? The play in the gear change has infinite possibilities that allow a sense of play. In this sense racing a car is not just putting your foot down hard on the accelerator, it is a manipulation of steering wheel, speed and gears to get the best performance out of the car engine to beat the other racers. The gear change adds to the sense of unpredictability, adds to the uniqueness of each race. In games there is a similar sense of freedom. As Weinsheimer (1993) states about games,

Every move is prescribed in advance--by the task to be performed, by the game plan, by the moves of the opponent, and by rules. Yet there is such freedom that no game is ever played twice identically, and for all this variety it is still the one game. To every game there belongs an element of unpredictability that one no more wishes to get rid of than one does its boundaries and restrictions" (p. 104).

Is it this quality of games that attracts the player? As players we can never master the "freedom for infinite variety even within finite limits" (p. 105).

In games we do not play the whole time we are engaged in the game, but as long as we are engaged in the game the game is playing. The sense of play I have in golf only happens as I hit the ball. The ball may go anywhere, and at times it does depending on my skill level, but when I walk to find my ball I am walking not playing. I am preparing to play the ball again for the game of golf, but often I am not consciously working out how to play my next shot. I may be thinking about a tale my playing partner and I am sharing as we play the game. An outsider makes sense of my behaviour of searching in the bushes, wading in a stream, or standing in a pit of sand because I am playing golf. I will behave in this way because I want to make the game of golf happen. I want to experience the sense of infinite possibilities that I can create by playing the ball in golf and trying to get it down the hole. I am attracted to the unpredictability of infinite possibilities within the finite field of play.

In a game such as tennis I may hit the ball more often than in golf but in the same way as in golf I only actually play the game when I hit the ball or prepare to hit the ball. At crossovers, or lapses in play my mind often wanders away from the actual game to possible plans after the game, or even the biomechanics of playing a stroke. As a player I exist in the game of tennis, I represent play to an outsider of the game. Inside the game I personally experience and become play when I am involved in affecting the infinite possibilities of the ball in the game.

Play in games

Earlier in our analysis of play it was indicated that play was very important to a 5 year old child. Does play in games have this type of importance? Huizinga (1949) indicates that in "summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside *ordinary* life as being *not serious*, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly"³ (p. 13). Is it not the case that to be serious is to display behaviour of being absorbed intensely? How can something be "*not serious*" yet "absorbing the player intensely"? Play can be this contradiction because when the players enter into the game they exist for the game. In the act of playing the game we become separate from the world, in a sense "we lose ourselves. We lose, first of all, our relation to the world of earnest, or serious purpose; but we do so by acquiring a different even deadly, seriousness. For a game to be genuine it must be taken seriously" Weinsheimer (1993, p. 102).

Do all games imply play for the players? Professional sportsmen and sportswomen play a game for money and to reach the status of professional they must have been attracted to the play in the game. However, whether this attraction continues when they play for money is questionable. I suspect that at times professionals still participate in their professional sporting activity because they want to play rather than for the money. If playing a game continuously becomes work for a professional player I wonder if the player would be able to maintain a high level of performance and intense focus associated with professional play. If playing a sport becomes too much work-like, a professional player may lose his interest and desire to play, and if able, the player will try to rest from the competitive play associated with playing their sport. Children need to similarly experience the play of the game when learning a game. If learning to play a game becomes too work-like, as when drills are used to practice skills needed in the game, then children will not have an interest or a desire to play the game. Desire and interest in playing a game are the elements that indicate a person is attracted to play, that a person wants to seriously play, that they want to be taken over by the experience of playing.

When engaged in a game we cannot play with the game, as we play with an object. The game must be in control of the players action. If we mess about in a game we are not playing we are mucking about, we are pretending to play. As Weinsheimer (1993) explains,

one cannot behave as *if* it [the game] were serious; it must be so. There is nothing at all fictive about the tension of a chess game or the humiliation of being mated. A boxer in the Olympic Games does not act as *if* he wanted to knock out his opponent;

³ Italics are Huizinga's own emphasis.

he actually tries to do so. Are these young men naturally brutal? If not, what comes over them that they can act in this way? What comes over everyone who plays?⁴ (p. 102).

Play is not always something good for the human condition. Violence, even unsanctioned by the rules of the game, can erupt in a game. Gadamer (1989) indicates that it is in this way "the primacy of the play over the consciousness of the players" enables players to behave and do something they would not do in everyday life (p. 104). If we watch a game of football or rugby, at times we see that players seem intent on inflicting bodily harm on each other for the aim of winning the game. Are these players just playing? Does play give a person the right to hurt another or themselves? In the world of professional sport, as long as players play within the rules they occasionally hurt one another or themselves, but they play knowing what could happen. When we play we tend to lose self-control and cede control to the game.

Children can hurt themselves playing, not necessarily when playing a game, but whenever they play. In this case the adult has the responsibility to prevent serious harm coming to the naive child. Does this mean that the adult should stop play due to the potential for harm? Is not a sense of danger, as in unsure what could happen, a part of the unpredictability that attracts humans to play? Does physical education offer a process that tries to help the player play with a reasonable understanding of safety? Is the meaning of play in the title of this paper to attract children to play with consideration to safety and personal security? What of those children, or even adults, who are not attracted to play or who feel unable to play?

Physical education and play: The spoil-sport

A spoil-sport is a "player who trespasses against the rules or ignores them" (Huizinga, 1949, p. 11). A spoil-sport is a person who does not want to, or feels unable to play. For example I can remember a child Ruby who decided not to play.

Ruby stood, nonchalantly in the modified tennis court that was made of four cones and a low net. The ball bounced several times as it tumbled past her. She turned and slowly walked to fetch the offending ball. Her partner Candice stared, emotionless, looking forward to the next partner change. The teacher joined the game.

"What's wrong Ruby?" He asked.

"Is it time to finish yet?" She responded.

The teacher frowned. "If you don't want to play, let me have a go with Candice."

⁴ Italics are Weinsheimer's own emphasis.

Ruby moved to the side of the court and sat down.

"How many bounces are we allowed?" The teacher asked Candice.

"As long as it is bouncing it is alive," she quickly responded.

Using a scoop to throw and catch the ball an animated game sprung into life. At times the ball barely settled in the scoop before being sent back to the other side of the court.

Candice beamed a smile, lunging and twisting to catch the ball.

"Good shot," the teacher cried; "that's a point to you"; as the ball sped past him.

"What's the score?" He inquired.

Candice shrugged her shoulders, but Ruby looking at the teacher replied; "That's four three to you."

Ruby was a spoil sport. Factors such as negative previous experiences in physical activities and lack of experiences in physical activities, especially games, may make perception of fun in physical challenges minimal. Sport psychologists call this behaviour "learned helplessness" (Biddle and Fox, 1989), believing that poor physical experiences lead to an avoidance of physical challenges, hence reducing the opportunities to develop physical skills. This in turn leads to fewer opportunities to develop even a moderate level of physical competency. One of the tasks of the physical educator is to try to get the spoil sports involved and the fact that Ruby knew the score seems to imply that she had an interest in the game. The game was exciting, Candice really played intently, testing herself physically and mentally and hopefully Ruby will be tempted to try next time. The task of getting children involved in games is an ongoing aim of the physical educator. As indicated earlier a prerequisite of play is its voluntary nature. This voluntary nature to play seems to indicate an absence of motive, but when anybody plays he has a motive to play. As Ellis (1973) explains, "play is not motivated by any other motive than seeking the reward inherent immediately in the activity" (p. 14). Candice wanted to play a game form of tennis, not to win (she did not even know the score) but simply to play. Ruby did not want to play.

Do spoil-sports choose not to play? When children play amongst themselves they do not always offer another child the choice of playing. Social structures between children negate the acceptability of a child to their peers based on a perceived difference of a particular child. In games where children rely on each other to make play happen, a child may not be physically competent enough to play with the children engaged in a game. Therefore he or she is not allowed to play by the other players, or he or she may decline to play to avoid suffering the humiliation of helping the opposition to win the game. When children pick teams the last child to be chosen is often the one who does not want to be, but is potentially, a spoil-sport. Good physical educators and parents try to prevent a child

from becoming a spoil-sport by teaching the child the essential physical and tactical skills needed to be an asset in a game structure and to positively contribute to the play of the game. Without this pedagogical influence a child may never realize the social and emotional benefits of playing in games, especially the physical games that dominate and give so much pleasure to players and spectators in our society. Play in this way is not just pleasure from winning, but pleasure from being able to play, knowing the "to and fro" nature, the unpredictability and intense seriousness associated with playing. In the same way the play in dance is not in being the best performer, but in creating the free atmosphere of dance. In contrast a good sport or rather sport is someone who is keen to play, open to suggestions, willing to strive for the goal of the activity, but whose priority is the play of the activity. A sport approaches activities like dance, gymnastics and games with the desire to discover what is possible when these activities play.

In society Huizinga (1949) observes that the spoil sport tends to be ignored, the sport praised. "The spoil sport shatters the play-world...reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world" (p.11). In fact, society is more lenient with the cheat who at least acknowledges the play world by breaking the rules than the spoil sport who refuses the invitation to play. When a person declines to play he or she is ignored by the players. As a spoil sport he or she does not exist in the play world. To be ignored is to be of little significance, to be potentially a social outcast. When we play with others we create social reliance, we create play, we generate an interest in each other. A physical educator when questioned about play highlighted this social quality that existed in a lesson he taught where children "really" played.

They [pupils] had a genuine desire to do well for others. As the children discovered how to co-operate in a game they got a growing sense of this desire, they enjoyed the feeling of achieving together.

Without access to the physical nature of play what would Ruby, a spoil-sport, not experience? Do all children play naturally? Children seem to play naturally with objects in their environment, but I wonder if children play naturally with each other.

How does a teacher get children to play in physical education?

Play does not happen automatically because the teacher has planned for the children to play. Some scholars have claimed that play is spontaneous (Ellis, 1976, p. 21). This may seem the case for animals and young children, but once play has been experienced potential players plan to play.

It would seem that play has to be voluntarily chosen by the player, that play has to be unpredictable in nature to have its attraction of infinite possibilities, that play has to have

rules to create order and a sense of a play world, that play can imply learning but can be just a release of energy if the player simply wants to play with a familiar structure, that play can be fun throughout its existence, or just during its process. But play is always serious to the player; it completely absorbs the player. An outsider can be a part of play, especially if the play is for them, by responding to the meaning of play, and in this meaning play creates a double meaning with the world that is not playing. Socially, play can have spoilsports who ignore the play world and who are subsequently ignored by the players. So what is it like to teach physical education so that children voluntarily choose to play?

There follows two stories where the teachers seemed to generate play for the pupils in their class.

The class from hell.

The grade six class stormed into the gym. Mandy smiled as she remembered that the principal had described them as 'the class from hell'. The girls in the class were reasonably well behaved but the boys, well they were an unruly bunch, many were big for their age, some were even bigger than Mandy; they were typical 'jockey' boys. As Mandy smiled she wondered if the children had remembered that they were going to do creative dance. When she had explained the idea in the previous lesson, Jason, the leader of the unruly bunch, had said with a resistant stare; "Oh yeah, going to get us to be clouds are you?" What was going to happen? The principal must have wondered as well because she had come to watch.

"We are going to do creative dance," Mandy started, "all I ask is that you give it a try. You might like it." As she spoke she caught every child's eye, their faces stared back blankly. Exuding enthusiasm Mandy, with the tape deck ready, launched into the lesson.

Initially the children treated the whole episode as a lark. Jason's expression was 'forget it lady'. Gradually and coaxingly Mandy introduced the movement ideas to the children. First a fast walk, then a pivot, then sleeping positions.

"The idea of the dance is that you are late," Mandy explained; "you have overslept, that is why you are in a rush. Now take up your sleep positions. Oh nice flop Shaun. Good Kirsty it really looks as you are leaning against something."

The infinite variety of sleep positions at different levels, using different combination of body parts signaled a personal quality to each shape.

"Now I will clap beats of eight. You do your fast, tense walks followed by a spin on the second phrase of eight...then whip off on the next walk and so on. CLAP!"

The children burst into action, in different directions, their bodies taut and stiff.

"CLAP six, CLAP seven and pivot. Well done. That's it keep control...but fast!!"

The children whizzed off into tense walks that were ready for another spin.

Mandy by focusing on the creative way in which children could drape and hang their bodies in sleeping positions, by stressing the dynamic effort quality of walking and pivoting with tension and urgency, by focusing movement in a direct path, the children, had discovered how to expressively move with their bodies.

The music was then added, broken into phrases of eight. As the music played the children used their fingers to mime out their movements. This produced a possibly worrying challenge for the child that felt unable to keep a rhythm, but somehow the supportive atmosphere of playing with the musical challenge created an expectant buzz in the air. The children were ready.

"Right into your sleep positions." Mandy ordered. The children rushed to take up their personal stance. Barely able to suppress the tension waiting to explode in their bodies the children flopped in unique shapes. The tape whined, there was an expectant hush, the music started and...the children were seriously late.

As Mandy watched the class she could see Jason, with a huge grin fixed from ear to ear, rushing earnestly around the gym within the phrasing of the music. He, among others during the lesson, had received well-earned praises for creativity and the display of a growing body awareness. The children's movements showed a sense of control, rhythm and purpose, their movements indicated focused, playful vitality.

The dance ran over two lessons, the children were completely focused on creating the dance, they were completely focused on Mandy's guidance, they existed in their own special community place constructed by the imagery and the music. At the end of both lessons the unruly class that normally had to be policed into a line to exit the gymnasium lined up automatically and quietly buzzed with excitement. The principal was amazed and so was Mandy.

Through Mandy's practice of responding to the children, of showing genuine appreciation for their growing body awareness, by creating a group sense of purpose but with individuality, the children had felt secure enough to take risks, to let themselves go with the momentum of the lesson. The creation of play had allowed the frivolous meaning of creative dance to co-exist with the meaning of intense seriousness and excitement for the pupils. If we accept Jason as a representation of the children then we get the sense that the class played for and with Mandy as she prompted, observed and responded to their play.

The following extracts from Lyons' (1992) story about an observed physical education lesson gives another insight into play in physical education. The author indicated that there is a special relationship between the teacher and the children. We pick up the story as the children enter the gymnasium.

"The basketball club...is it still on?"

They [pupils] have come upon a treasure trove of basketballs in the store cupboard and are making the most of their unexpected bounty....

Bob walks in a few minutes later...There's no need for a whistle or command. The flurry of game activity has halted. I suppose that is what some of the prescriptive, how-to-teach texts call 'classroom presence'. Attention is focused on Bob...He follows kit [appropriate athletic clothing] comments with news of this evening's basketball club which is open to the second and third year [the pupils in the class]...whispers abate about the club....

He organizes the class into teams and divides them into 'shirts' and 'skins', 7 v 6...the heaviest boy in the group, Anush, is in the skin team. He seems reluctant to take his shirt off which does not surprise me....

Almost immediately, 'shirts' have a shot at the basket. 'Beautiful shot', is Bob's response. Within a short time, it is an animated game with all the boys calling for the ball when their team has possession. Some of the boys exhibit tactical sophistication whilst others seem to respond to the scale of the court and the size of the ball by passing backwards. (p. 248)

Lyons (1992) describes how Bob coaches the children to be more selective with their calling. When the game re-starts the 'skins' team score the first basket and then a second. Bob praises and coaches, giving a running commentary of the match. With the game evenly matched the 'shirt' team takes a lead as Lyons indicates;

One of the talented players in the 'shirts' team, Matt, scores twice in a minute. Bob's response is 'Oh, magnificent'.

There is frantic activity. Bob whistles for a halt in proceedings. 'Don't all converge on the basket'. He asks the pupils to think back to previous games when they have worked on play around the basket.

The game restarts with a lot of activity but no scoring....

In the last moments of the game, in true *Boys' Own* fashion, Anush receives a pass near the basket. For the first time in the lesson, he declines to pass and...he scores to everyone's delight. That is the end of the game.

As the boys leave the gym, Anush asks Bob about the basketball club. 'Is it still on?' (p. 249).

Lyons (1991) uses this anecdotal story to give a sense of what it can be like to exist as a physical education teacher. Like Mandy's tale, this anecdote seems to highlight the sense of play for the children and the spectator, Bob. When Bob taught he became a privileged spectator and conductor of play. Like the audience of a play, he became a player in the

sense of the children fashioning meaning for their play through him. This disposition creates a community separate from the real world that exists by its own right; it allows the unlikely to happen - Anush, a potential spoil-sport, to score, Anush to be a hero. Bob had created within this lesson a pedagogical atmosphere of opportunity. Anush's joy at scoring a basket would be a treasured emotional memory. Within the lesson Bob had guided the children's actions to better suit the team nature sense of playing the game. The skins' team had all felt pleasure when Anush scored. The closeness of the game seemed to sharpen and make all the children more enthusiastic to play. The meaning of the game had become the most important thing in teacher's and pupils' lives at that point, but in the academic focus of schooling the game had little meaning.

Do these stories inform us as to the meaning of play in the title? When a physical educator aims to get a child playing in physical education it is not simply to *let the child play*, it is *let*, as in enable, the child to play. To play in reasonable safety, to discover how to play with other children, to expend energy and relieve tension, to learn about themselves and others, to discover the world of play that creates double meanings of possibility, to enjoy being human. As Huizinga (1949) says,

Animals play, so they must be more than merely mechanical things. We play and know that we play so we must be more than merely rational beings, for play is irrational. (p. 4)

To me, and to the physical education colleagues I have asked, considerable joy in teaching physical education comes from enabling the spiritual nature of play to engulf every pupil in a lesson so that each pupil is filled with the to and fro excitement, two-fold meaning and unpredictability that serious play creates. Serious play can create situations of physical, cognitive, emotional and social danger, but this danger can be skillfully alleviated and channeled into opportunity by the teacher's reflexive attention to the lesson. Play creates a special relationship between human beings. When children play, really play in a physical education lesson, a teacher knows that he or she has strengthened the ultimate goal of physical education -- a life-long desire to physically play.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to all my physical educator friends whose stories and ideas have enriched this paper. Thanks also to my colleagues at the University of Alberta who read and gave insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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**PLAY IS WHAT WE DESIRE IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION:
A phenomenological analysis**

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